

African Elephant

PUBLIC ART COLLECTION IDENTIFICATION SUMMARY



Number: 0086

Artist: Fowler, Robert
Long, John / Schalekamp, Phil (Assistant)

Title: African Elephant

Date: 1982

Type: Sculpture

Medium: Cor-ten Steel

Dimensions: 12' x 10' x 28'

Foundry/Fabricator: Artist

Location/Environment: West Entrance
Houston Zoological Gardens

Provenance: Donated to the City of
Houston Zoo by Isabell and Max Herzstein

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City of Houston Municipal Art
www.houstonmunicipalart.org

African Elephant

Historical Background

African Elephant, a sculpture by Bob Fowler, was donated by Isabell and Max Herzstein to the Houston Zoological Gardens in 1982. Its installation in the zoo was part of the renovation initiated by Zoo Friends of Houston, Inc., a non-profit volunteer organization, which raises funds and sponsors fund-raising events to provide financial assistance the Houston Zoological Gardens. The sculpture was originally sited at the main entrance of the zoo. The *African Elephant* is now located at the new West entrance of the zoo.

An African elephant was chosen as a suitable subject for a sculptural installation at the zoo for two reasons. The African elephant is a larger and often noted as a more majestic breed of elephant than the Asian elephant and unlike their Asian relatives, cannot be tamed. Consequently, a life-size sculpture offers the zoo patron an opportunity to experience the impressive size of an African elephant at close range. Most importantly, it is possible that the African elephant may become extinct in our lifetime. Hopefully, this sculpture will remind visitors that the zoo is not only a fun tourist destination, but also a vital link to educating the public on the importance of preserving our endangered species. After eight years of research and one year, six weeks construction, Fowler completed *African elephant* in 1982.

Artist History

Robert Fowler began working as a full time sculptor in 1963. Throughout his career he has created a large body of work that is in public and private collections around the world. Among his many awards, he was the first American to win first place in the International Exhibit of Sacred Art, Trieste, Italy, 1966. Fowler is known for portraying dynamic animal forms as well as abstract forms. He presently resides in Wimberly, Texas.

Physical Description

African Elephant is a five ton, life-sized welded steel sculpture that is comprised of strips of Cor-ten steel and rods that are fused into each other to give the elephant its form. The steel armature supports are intentionally visible and act as the anchoring points in the legs.

This representational sculpture depicts the form of a striding elephant with its trunk extended and ears outstretched. Its proper left legs extend in a forward motion and the proper right legs are in stride, giving the impression of motion. The sculpture's surface handling of welded seam over rods of Cor-ten and Cor-ten plate enhances the illusion of taught sinewy muscles.

The accompanying plaques read as follows:

Bob Fowler/ c. 1982/ John Long Asst./ Phil Schalekamp Asst.

The second plaque reads: For our children, grandchildren/ and all the young at heart/ Isabell and Max Herzstein/ May 2, 1982/ Sculptor - Bob Fowler/ Through Zoo Friends

Restoration / Conservation

The *African Elephant* was fully restored and relocated in 2000. The sculpture will receive a yearly treatment of oil to protect the Cor-ten steel.